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# Old barn is testament to one man's commitment to education for his four girls

*Along the way, W.T. Thomasson educated himself, kept records and became one of Virginia's most notable dairymen*

**EDITOR'S NOTE:** Some months ago a *Bull Run Observer* reader, Lucy Geris, asked us about the barn at the Rt. 234 Bypass and Rt. 28. After speaking with Prince William County officials, members of the original owner's family as well as friends and neighbors, Staff Writer Helen Graves learned that the barn is truly a part of Prince William County history. She filed the report which follows:

The barn is still standing because of its historic value. The structure and surrounding land are owned by Prince William County. How the barn will eventually be used has not been determined. Renovation of the barn has to fit in with design plans for *Innovation*, the county's technology area.

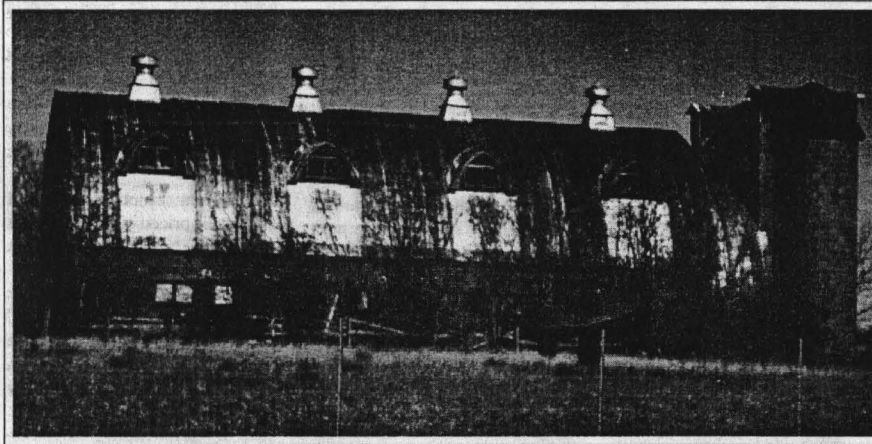
Perhaps *Bull Run Observer* readers can come up with some good ideas and the possibility of a fund-raiser toward that effort. Suggestions or questions may be addressed to Sherman Patrick in the Prince William County Planning office, 703-792-6000.

By HELEN GRAVES  
Observer Staff

The barn at the 234 Bypass and Rt. 28 and surrounding farmland belonged to Will T. Thomasson, fondly known as W.T. Mr. Thomasson was a Pennsylvania Dunkard, a name that referred to Brethren Church members.

He made his start early in the early 1900s on 40 acres of poor land which had been neglected and practically abandoned. His only other assets were three cows, two horses and a few farming tools. The house was habitable and the barn furnished a poor shelter in which to house the stock. The land hesitated before it would yield five bushels of wheat and a barrel of corn to each acre. The hay crop was not even worth harvesting.

Mr. Thomasson made a living the first couple of years, and that was about all. After saving for and



Helen Graves/the Bull Run Observer

The W.T. Thomasson Barn at Rt. 28 and the 234 Bypass is a testament to what was once one of Virginia's most successful dairy farms. The barn is now owned by Prince William County, which welcomes readers' suggestions for possible uses.

buying a Holstein bull, he got into dairy farming. As the size of his herd increased, the amount of his milk check grew. Profit was reinvested in the farm, improving the land, remodeling the buildings, purchasing machinery and equipment and building good fences. The cows were the answer to his success. They not only provided a good income every month, but also produced plenty of manure which was used to build up the land. All of the roughage and grain were purchased, except the corn and cobmeal which were ground at home.

Mr. Thomasson's farm was well cared for. Fences were well built and the fence rows were clean. The fields showed that a campaign to eradicate weeds was continually in progress.

The dairy stable was as clean as a spotless kitchen and even the most rigid inspector would favor the Thomasson dairy room with a high score.

According to a magazine article published in 1919, over the course of ten years, Dunkard Thomasson rose from the position of a day laborer to the ownership of one of the most profitable farms in the county.

As the herd increased, it outgrew the old, remodeled barn. It was not a very convenient barn to work in and not as comfortable for the cows as Mr. Thomasson would have liked, so a new barn, the one you see today, was built.

Since the old barn had been dark, hard to keep clean and damp much of the time when the cows were in it, the new barn had more comfortable surroundings and the cows could assimilate their feed better in modern stalls with plenty of sunlight and air. The new ventilation system took out the damp, foul air and maintained ideal conditions all the time.

All these improvements meant increased milk production, as it was cooler for the cows while milking. Thomasson had his own, early version of air conditioning, although not exactly as we know it today. The convenience of the new barn saved a lot of time and there was more feed storage space. The dairy barn, or "factory" as Mr. Thomasson called it, was not only beautiful in design, but was the last word in convenience, sanitation and durability.

It is no wonder he was considered one of the most successful

farmers in the state. The motivation for building this fine farm property was centered on crops, but on what good thing would finance his children's education. Mr. Thomasson wished to make sure that each of his four daughters would have the greatest opportunity possible.

He was a student of agriculture and a hard worker. He used the best available scientific knowledge of soil and crop rotation. He studied dairy problems and learned from other dairymen, the college bulletins and from Hoard's Dairyman. Most of all the farmer believed in keeping good records when many others thought it was too much trouble.

He found it little trouble to keep records on his cows or field crops. In fact, it would have cost much more not to keep them. That is how poor producing cows, or boarders, were weeded out when they didn't produce any money for the farm.

The farm, then, was productive, furnishing an abundance of hay, ensilage and most of the grain for the herd. Mr. Thomasson could raise 70 to 90 bushels of corn to the acre, and 30 to 35 bushels of

wheat. After supplying enough feed for the livestock, he usually sold several carloads of hay.

The Thomassons' four daughters, perhaps known better by their married names, were Elizabeth Kline, Claudia Compton, Agnes Huffman and Sally Ball.

The whole family helped with the milking. Agnes remembers milking 60 cows a day in the barn. It was well known that the girls could milk faster than the milking machines that were later bought for the farm.

Mr. Thomasson bought land until the farm spread over 664 acres, and he had a reputation as having the best dairy farm in the area. Milk was shipped to Washington, DC and the market price was. It wasn't long until monthly checks from \$400 to \$600, and then to \$1500. Milk cans were used for hauling grain and roughage to the market and then sold at premium prices.

Mr. Thomasson started raising and buying horses for Thompson's Dairy in Washington, DC The horses were used in the home delivery of dairy products. He continued to do well until his death in 1950.

Unfortunately, the land changed hands and was sold to New York investors. The other original buildings from the farm are gone, with only the barn remaining.

Most barns of that era, the late teens and early 1920s, were of wood construction, but the Thomasson barn was made of tile and some brick. The tin roof was put on by Will Kerlin, a local man who put many tin roofs on barns and houses at that time. Mr. Thomasson went to friends in Washington, DC to get the solid oak flooring which still remains in the loft, and in good shape, today.

The W.T. Thomasson Barn and name should be remembered as an important part of the history of our county. Starting as a laborer and becoming one of the most successful dairy farmers in the Commonwealth is a big accomplishment.